

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2836

As Passed House:

February 6, 1996

Title: An act relating to authority for setting speed limits.

Brief Description: Authorizing speed limits set according to engineering and traffic studies.

Sponsors: Representatives K. Schmidt, R. Fisher and Blanton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/29/96 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/6/96, 97-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 24 members: Representatives K. Schmidt, Chairman; Benton, Vice Chairman; Mitchell, Vice Chairman; Skinner, Vice Chairman; Hatfield, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Backlund; Blanton; Buck; Cairnes; Chandler; Chopp; Elliot; Hankins; Horn; Johnson; McMahan; Ogden; Quall; Robertson; Romero; D. Schmidt; Scott; Sterk and Tokuda.

Staff: Mary McLaughlin (786-7309).

Background: The Secretary of the Department of Transportation (DOT) may increase the speed limit on any state highway to a maximum of 70 miles per hour (mph) based on an engineering and traffic investigation. For the past 21 years this authority has been preempted by federal law.

In January 1974, Congress set the national speed limit at 55 mph for energy conservation purposes. States that did not achieve a 50 percent compliance rate with the 55 mph limit were subject to a withholding of federal highway construction dollars.

In April 1987, the Federal Surface Transportation Assistance Act authorized the states, at their discretion, to set the speed limit along the rural interstate system at a maximum of 65 mph. In anticipation of this move, the 1987 Legislature enacted a

measure which stated that if the national speed limit was modified for the rural interstate, the secretary of the DOT would raise the speed limit to 65 mph on those segments determined to be safely posted above 55 mph. In addition, a Senate floor amendment was adopted, which stated that the speed limit on I-5 between Everett and Olympia could not be increased above 55 mph.

Effective December 8, 1995, the national maximum speed limit was repealed and control was returned to the states. The DOT is currently investigating the feasibility of raising the speed limit along the Everett-to-Olympia corridor to 60 mph.

Summary of Bill: Obsolete language allowing the secretary to raise the speed limit to 65 mph on the rural interstate system is removed. The limitation on raising the speed limit above 55 mph on the I-5 Everett to Olympia corridor is deleted. (Current law allows the secretary of the DOT to adjust speed limits after engineering and traffic investigations.)

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The department will be given more flexibility in setting maximum speed limits. The DOT will set speed limits in the same manner as it did prior to imposition of the national 55 mph speed limit (based on engineering and traffic investigations).

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Dave Peach, Department of Transportation; and Marsh Pugh, Washington State Patrol.